

A YANKEE IN GRAY.
BY CHARLES B. LEWIS ("M. QUAD.")
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CHAPTER XXIII.

"As was stated in a previous chapter, Captain Wyle's company, along with others, had been returned to the valley and placed under the orders of General Amberson. Ike Baxter and the others captured at Kernstown had rejoined the company when exchanged. Ike felt more than ever that Royal Kenton was an enemy he must get rid of, and Captain Wyle encouraged this feeling in various ways, though never openly and directly committing himself. On two occasions Ike had been granted leave of absence to visit his wife. Both times as had met her secretly.

The spirit which animated this humble twain will surprise only those who have never encountered the "poor whites" of the south. Nine out of ten of the bloody and long continued feuds we read of in southern communities begin among the poor and ignorant. The cause is generally of trifling character. The "poor white" may be humbled by the law, but outside of the courtroom he hates with an intensity hard to realize. He is persistent, cunning, merciless. Ike Baxter had never had an ambition in his life up to the hour he enlisted. He could barely read and write, was naturally lazy and indifferent and felt no pride in anything except the fact that he was "better than a nigger." When he found that corporals and sergeants were looked up to and respected, there came a queer feeling in his heart. He could not credit it at first, but Captain Wyle aided him in his mental struggle. The day came when Ike had an ambition and a burning desire. It was to be a corporal or sergeant. In his wild dreams of glory he did not stop there. He determined to go higher and become a lieutenant or captain. As soon as he was given to understand that Royal Kenton stood in his way it was but natural with one of his nature to determine to remove the obstacle by any means possible.

Before the war the "Yankee," both as a man and as the representative of a section of the republic, had few friends in the south. He was supposed to be hostile to all southern "institutions." The more ignorant the southerner the more hostile he hated and despised the citizen of the north. He believed that the fire eating politicians pretended to believe and often asserted. The John Brown raid upon slavery in Virginia and the events in "Bleeding Kansas" served to intensify the sectional hate of the "poor white." Thus it was that Ike Baxter, picking up his crumbs of history and his bits of information on current events at the doors of the livery stable or at the steps of the bar-room, was something of a local champion in the matter of Yankee hating. If Kenton had not stood between him and military glory, he would still have felt a bitterness toward him as a man born in the north. Uncle Ben's cautious approach to the house on this night had reference only to Mrs. Baxter. There was another man stealing through the darkness and making a noiseless approach at the same time—Ike Baxter. Neither Uncle Ben nor Marian Percy caught a sight of him, but he noticed their every movement and drew his own conclusions. The gun which two old men had been told to secure was in his room in the little house. He had departed from Rest Haven without being seen or his absence noted by the woman, but his return aroused her, and her sharp eyes were upon him as he carried away the firearm and loaded himself with the bundles Marian had prepared and brought to the door. She was dressing to follow him as he disappeared down the highway, having a dim suspicion of the state of affairs, when she knocked at her window and was admitted. In less than a minute he had related what he saw outside, and she had told him of Uncle Ben taking the gun.

"What's he on about for?" queried Ike.

"Dunno, but snuffin's happened sum-what. Yo' must follow him!"

"Has that Yankee bin yer?"

"No, but the gal's hearn news, fur short! Reckon he may may be lyin on around yer sum-what, and the nigger's takin out stuff to him! Git right after he on, Ike, and if yo' find the Yankee go'n, tell Captain Wyle and hev him cum with his critter company!"

"I'll do better'n that!" grimly replied the man as he stepped out into the night. "If I find that Yankee around yer, I'll put a bullet into him fast and tell Captain Wyle next!"

Uncle Ben had only a few hundred yards to the start, and the man on his trail soon learned the distance until he could hear the old man's footsteps and make out a shadowy form through the darkness. There seemed nothing more certain than that he would follow on and uncover the hiding place of the fugitive. For nearly three-quarters of a mile the slave messenger had but one idea—to return to Steve Brayton as fast as possible. He was hurrying along when a sudden thought flashed through his brain, and he instinctively stopped and halted to listen.

"How do I know but what dat wuman dan heard me git de gun an is fol-lerin me?" he whispered to himself. "She'd do it! She's powerful wicked, she am! An mebbe some mo' of dem gorillas am waitin long yere to grab me an giv me anoder whippin!"

He was listening as well as whispering, and after a minute he heard the sounds of footsteps coming down the road. He drew back into the deeper shadow of the high bank, dropped his bundles, and taking a firm grip of his gun he mentally resolved to make a fight for it if he was overhauled by the same crowd as before. A few seconds later he realized that only one person was approaching. The footfalls were too heavy for a woman. He had just decided this point when a man loomed up in the darkness before him and halted almost within arm's length to mut-ter:

"Dat my hide, but has that ole nigger left the road an giv me the slip? I

heard he un only a minit ago, but him's dun gone now!"

It was Ike Baxter of course. He stood peering and listening for half a minute and then growled:

"I orter hev run he un right down an made him show me the way! Now the cussed Yankee may git away from me! No, he won't though! I'll hunt over every foot of this country but what I'll find him an bet his scalp!"

Uncle Ben did not recognize the man at all, as it had been many months since he had heard Ike Baxter's voice. He was instantly plain to him, however, that the man was a determined enemy and was seeking Royal Kenton's life. Ike took three or four steps forward and stopped again to listen. Noiselessly and with such a feeling as he had never experienced before Uncle Ben clutched his gun, took one silent step forward



Uncle Ben clutched his gun.

and next instant brought the heavy stock down upon Ike's head and felled him to the earth. The man sank down without a cry or groan, and after waiting half a minute the old man gasped out:

"May de good Lawd dun forgive me, but I had to do it fur Miss Sunshine's sake!"

He picked up his bundles and hastened on. A few minutes later was telling Steve Brayton what had happened. "Glad of it!" replied the latter. "Reckon I orter go up thar and make shot he's dead, fur I orter think his name are Ike Baxter. Hain't got no time, though—not just now. This way, Uncle Ben."

They passed between two great boulders which had fallen from the bank above, followed a ravine into the hills for about 200 feet, and after a climb up the right hand bank found the hiding place among the rocks. There was a small fire burning against a great boulder, and on a bed of leaves and branches lay Royal Kenton with a bullet wound in the calf of the right leg. It was a bit of good luck for him in the midst of adversity that the bullet had passed clear through without touching the bone. It was a painful and temporarily disabling wound, and he had lost much of his strength before the bleeding could be checked, but he was inclined to make light of the situation as Brayton and Uncle Ben appeared.

The old darky knew Kenton only by sight, but the sight of him lying there in that helpless condition was a call for him to throw himself down on his knees and moan out:

"Po' de Lawd an fo' de Lawd, but what am Miss Sunshine gwine to say an do when she knows dat he bin shotted wid a dozen bombshells?"

Kenton soon made the situation plain to him, and then as the two talked about affairs at the house Steve Brayton washed and bound up the wound, and made up a comfortable bed, arranged one of the blankets for a shelter and saw that Kenton ate as well as talked. The adventure which Uncle Ben had on the road was felt to be another menace to be guarded against. After leaving the house where they had taken breakfast and encountered the Confederate sergeant, they had hastened up the side of the mountain and headed direct for Rest Haven. Within an hour they found that a number of men were on their trail, and two or three times during the day they were obliged to hide themselves for an hour or two. No shots were exchanged until about 5 o'clock in the evening, and then they were fired upon by three men in ambush. Kenton was hit and fell, but he struggled up and made a run of it, with Steve Brayton covering his retreat. Pain and loss of blood finally brought the wounded man down again, and he appealed to Steve to leave him and make his own escape.

"Couldn't think of it, Yank—couldn't possibly play any sich dirt on a man who has fust 'longside o' me so often!" was the hearty reply. "There was only this of 'em when they tust popped at us, and I'm sartin shore thar hain't but two now, and mebbe one o' them is wuss off than yo' ar! I hain't been shootin five or six times jest for the fun of it! If yo' can't walk, yo've got to be carried!"

Heeding none of Kenton's protests, the faithful fellow got him on his back and picked his route through scrub and over rocks until he reached the spot where Uncle Ben found them. He knew it was within a mile or two of Rest Haven, and he was about starting for the house when the old man came along.

"I'll take a trot up the road and see how the nigger's dead man is," said Steve when he could do no more for Kenton. "It's my overlastin opinyun that the chap will turn out to be Ike Baxter, and I shan't be overly sorry if sich ar' the case. I'll have to git the body outter the way anyhow, befo' anybody stumbles over it."

In the course of 20 minutes he reached the spot, but no man, living or dead, was to be found. He made a thorough hunt, but nothing could be discovered.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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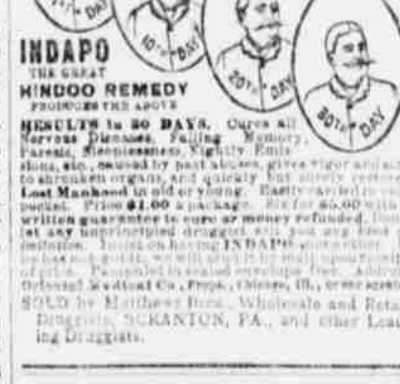
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